

CBS EVENING NEWS
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FILE ONLY

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Ronald Pelton Trial

RATHER: The spy case of Ronald Pelton has already made waves. CIA Director William Casey publicly pressuring for prosecution of news organizations that told the American people what Pelton is accused of telling the Soviets. Today, opening arguments in the spy trial of Pelton himself.

Rita Braver was there.

RITA BRAVER: The government says that Ronald Pelton wrote the National Security Agency's encyclopedia on Soviet communications and that for \$35,000 he sold the Soviets details on five top secret projects, including long-range plans to improve the equipment used to intercept Soviet communications. The government said that in 1980, broke and having resigned from his NSA job, Pelton called the Soviet Embassy in Washington to set up a rendezvous. Two calls were picked up on an FBI wiretap. But it wasn't until last summer that the FBI learned who spoke in the calls. That's when Vitaly Yurchenko, the Soviet intelligence operative who briefly defected to the U.S., told the FBI that he was one of the Russians who talked to Pelton.

Today jurors heard that call.

[Clip of telephone call]

BRAVER: And armed with Yurchenko's information, FBI agents invited Pelton to meet with them in this Annapolis hotel. Here they hinted he could become a double agent, and he confessed to more details of his spying, including two trips to Vienna, where he spent days writing information at the Soviet Embassy.

Pelton now says he felt coerced into confessing to the FBI, and that will be the main theme of his defense.

FRED WARREN BENNETT: That the interrogation itself was conducted with law enforcement techniques that, in effect, impaired his capacity for freedom of choice or for self-determination.

BRAVER: Another line of defense will be that Pelton was under the influence of drugs and alcohol that he'd taken before confessing to the FBI.